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THE DOCTRINE OF THE DIVINE DECREES, THE FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINE OF THE GOSPEL.

The best definition of the doctrine of God's decrees, that ever has been given, and perhaps the best, that can be given, is found in the Westminster catechism. In answer to the question, 'What are the decrees of God,' it is said, 'The decrees of God are his eternal purpose according to the counsel of his own will, whereby for his own glory he hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass.—In eternity it depended entirely upon the determination of God, whether any other being should ever exist; because no other being could exist without his power and agency. His determination, therefore, must infallibly fore-ordain whatever should come to pass. Of all events, which were possible, the decrees of God rendered the existence of whatever comes to pass absolutely certain. God did not decree things because he saw that they would exist; but because he saw that they would not exist, without

his decrees. His decrees respected all future events, and precisely in the same manner—to make their existence certain. He decreed the existence, the character, the conduct and the state of all moral beings, both in time and eternity. He decreed that some should be the monuments of his goodness, some the monuments of his justice, and some the monuments of his mercy. And he decreed all the means, by which his rational creatures should be brought to their final and eternal condition. In his decrees, which respect all his creatures and all events, God had a supreme regard to his own glory, which is the greatest and best object, that ever can exist. Nothing more and nothing less, than what is now stated, is to be understood by the doctrine of divine decrees.

It is now proposed to show that this doctrine is true. To prove this doctrine I might draw my first argument from the foreknowledge of God. James declares, that "known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." And it is generally al-

** Now then can I be blamed for not
seeing that if God decreed their conduct.*

lowed, that God foreknows all future events. From this divine foreknowledge, it might be easily demonstrated, that God has decreed all things, that ever have, or ever will come to pass.—I might draw a second argument in favor of the doctrine of divine decrees, from explicit declarations of scripture concerning the purpose of God and the eternal counsel of his own will respecting all his creatures and all their actions. But I will wave the consideration of these arguments and insist only on a third argument, which may be drawn from the infinite wisdom of God.

It is universally granted, that God is a being of infinite wisdom. But no wise being can begin to act, until he has determined what to do. To act without design and without a good design is the very essence of folly. But to act with design and with a good design is the very essence of wisdom.—Hence it follows, that God must have decreed all things, as the foundation of his beginning to act. He must have laid the foundation, before he began to erect the superstructure. And he must have laid the foundation exactly according to the length and breadth and height of the edifice. Or, to speak without a figure, God must have determined in his own mind his whole system of conduct before he began to act. Without such a determination, it was impossible, that his works should be absolutely perfect. If he had

left any one thing undetermined, it might have frustrated his whole design. There are but two reasons, why the works of men are imperfect. One is, that they are too ignorant to form a perfect plan. And the other is, that they are too weak to accomplish the plan they may form. But God can do any thing. He can accomplish any plan he forms, and he can form the best plan, that is possible. Hence, knowing his own power and wisdom, he must have formed the most perfect plan, before he began to operate. His infinite wisdom would not permit him to begin the work of creation, until he had decreed the nature, the number, the use and end of all created objects. The decrees of God must be the foundation of all his works. This is as certain, as it is that he is the only wise God.

But I proceed to my main object, which is to show, that the doctrine of the divine decrees is the fundamental doctrine of the gospel. The other essential doctrines of the gospel are founded upon the doctrine of divine decrees, and are supported by it. To deny or disprove this doctrine would be to deny or disprove the whole gospel. Every system of sentiments has some fundamental principle, without which it cannot exist. The fundamental principle in the Newtonian philosophy is, that no material body has a tendency to move of itself, without an external cause of motion. For

remove this principle and the Newtonian philosophy can be entirely overthrown. The first principle in civil government is, that all men have natural rights, which they ought to enjoy, so far as it is consistent with the general good of society. For remove this principle, and there will remain no foundation of civil government.—The first principle in the scheme of salvation according to the gospel is, that God has decreed all things from eternity. For remove this doctrine, and no doctrine of the gospel can be maintained; for there remains no foundation to support the gospel. The doctrine of divine decrees, therefore, lies at the foundation of the gospel, and supports all its essential doctrines. But I will enter more particularly into this subject and mention a number of the most essential doctrines of the gospel, which wholly depend upon the doctrine of divine decrees.

1. It is a doctrine of the gospel, that God has a moral character, which is perfectly holy and amiable. We read that God is love; that he is good to all; that he is just and gracious. These are moral qualities, which form the most amiable moral character. But we cannot conceive, that these moral perfections should belong to God, unless he has some purposes and designs. Take from God his decrees or intentions, and we cannot conceive, that he should sustain any moral character; and much less a moral character of perfect good-

ness. There can be no goodness without good purposes and designs. And if God has never formed any good purposes, he has never exercised any real holiness, or goodness. Hence, Bolingbroke and other deists, who deny the decrees of God, equally deny his moral perfections. And in this respect they are consistent with themselves. For if God has never formed any purposes, he has never formed a good moral character. The doctrine of divine decrees is, therefore, fundamental to the doctrine of the moral perfection of God.

2. It is a doctrine of the gospel, that the scriptures were written under divine inspiration. But how could God inspire the sacred writers to record those predictions, which are contained in the Bible, if he had not fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass? The Bible abounds in predictions of great, distant, and important events.—We find the prediction, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head; that the old world should be destroyed in a hundred and twenty years; that the seed of Abraham should be strangers in a strange land four hundred years; that the Jews should go into captivity in Babylon for seventy years; that after three score and two weeks Messiah should be cut off, but not for himself; that the Persians should destroy the Babylonians, the Greeks the Persians, and the Romans the Greeks; that Jerusalem

good. should be totally destroyed, and the Jews scattered among all nations; and that Christ shall reign on earth a thousand years. These and many other great events have been foretold by the prophets, Jesus Christ and the apostles. But God could not inspire them to foretell these events, unless he had decreed, that they should certainly take place. To deny the decrees of God, is, therefore, to deny that the Bible is his word. If God has not decreed all things, it can be demonstrated that the scriptures are a cunningly devised fable.

3. It is an essential doctrine of the gospel, that Christ died on the cross to make an atonement for sin. But there is no truth in this doctrine, unless God decreed to save sinners. For Christ professed to come in the name of his Father, to obey his Father, and to die at the express command of his Father. But if his Father never decreed the salvation of sinners, it is certain that his Father never sent him, and never commanded him to die in the room of sinners; so that Christ is found a false witness. And then, though he died on the cross, his death could make no atonement, and be of no avail to the salvation of sinners. But if he died according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God; if he was obedient to his Father, even unto the death of the cross; then his dying, the just for the unjust, may avail to bring sinners unto God. The truth of

Christ's mission, and the value of his death, depend upon the doctrine of the divine decrees. And the denial of this doctrine is virtually and necessarily the denial of the atonement of Christ and the whole glory of the gospel.

4. It is a doctrine of the gospel, that multitudes, in future time, shall cordially embrace it. Our Lord spake many parables to illustrate the future prevalence of the gospel, and its happy influence upon the hearts of men.— But there cannot be the smallest evidence, that any sinner ever will embrace the gospel without the special grace of God. For all mankind naturally oppose the gospel and reject it, as long as they can. And they can reject it, as long as their carnal mind remains. But there is no evidence, that God will exercise his special grace for the salvation of sinners, if he has not decreed to save any of mankind. But it may be demonstrated, that no impenitent sinner will ever be brought to repentance, if God has not decreed to sanctify any of the human race. The doctrine of regeneration depends upon the doctrine of election, or the divine decrees. To deny this doctrine, amounts to the denial that God ever has renewed, and that he ever will renew one of the depraved children of men. If God has not decreed to renew any person, it can be demonstrated, that no person ever has been, or ever will be renewed. But if God has decreed to save some of the hu-

man race, then it may be demonstrated, that he will renew those, whom he has determined to save. Accordingly the apostle says, "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called." The doctrine of regeneration is therefore founded upon the doctrine of election.

5. It is a doctrine of the gospel, that they, who are renewed, shall certainly persevere in holiness and be conducted to heaven. Unto the saints at Philippi, the apostle says, "He, who hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." They, who are once renewed, shall, according to the gospel, be kept by the mighty power of God unto salvation. But this doctrine of the gospel depends upon the eternal purpose of God to save a certain number of mankind. For if this purpose be denied, it amounts to a denial, that any saint will finally persevere. Without the doctrine of election, it cannot be proved, that God will conduct a single saint to heaven. But it can be demonstrated, that he will not do it. For certainly he will never conduct a saint to heaven, without determining to do it. And it is now too late for a being of infinite wisdom to form any new purpose. But if God has decreed to save a certain number of mankind, through sanctification of the spirit, and belief of the truth, then those, whom he has renewed and caused to believe the truth, he will conduct to the kingdom of heaven. The doctrine of divine

decrees is the only and the complete foundation for the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints.

6. It is a doctrine of the gospel, that they, who persevere in holiness, shall be completely and forever happy. But the complete and eternal happiness of saints in a future state depends upon the doctrine of divine decrees. If God has not decreed what their state shall be in eternity, it cannot be proved, that the happiness of heaven will not come to a final period. God does not know, nor can any creature know, that saints shall be happy in heaven forever, unless God has decreed it. But if he has decreed that all things in heaven and earth and all worlds, shall work together for good to them that love him and are called according to his purpose, then it can be known, that the joys of heaven will never cease. Hence the certainty of the future and eternal happiness of holy creatures depends entirely upon the doctrine of divine decrees.

7. It is a plain doctrine of the gospel, that they, who die in their sins, shall be finally and eternally lost. But this doctrine depends upon their being ordained to eternal destruction. For if God has not decreed, that the finally impenitent shall be eternally miserable, it cannot be proved, that their punishment shall never cease. Nor does even God himself know but he shall release them from the pains of hell and raise them to the

** Is not the language harsh?
Could not the same idea be better
expressed?*

joys of heaven in some future period. But if they shall be condemned to that everlasting punishment, to which they were appointed from eternity, then it is certain, that their miseries will never end. The doctrine of eternal punishment, therefore, depends upon the doctrine of the divine decrees.

8. The general resurrection is clearly taught in the gospel.— But this doctrine is founded upon the decrees of God. Hymeneus and Philetus denied the general resurrection; and all must deny it, who deny the doctrine of divine decrees. For how can it be proved, that, in some distant period, God will raise all, who are in their graves, to a re-union of soul and body, unless he has decreed to do it? This great doctrine of the gospel depends upon the divine decrees, which alone render it worthy of universal belief.

9. The gospel abundantly teaches us, that all things shall eventually terminate in the glory of God and in the highest good of the universe. But the truth of this doctrine depends upon the decrees of God. For if he has not decreed all things in the universe, and absolutely fixed every event, it cannot be certain, that all things will terminate, either in his glory, or in the highest happiness of moral beings. Indeed, upon this supposition, it is absolutely uncertain how things will terminate. They may, for ought that can be known by God or man, terminate in the

complete and endless misery of the universe. But if God has decreed all things, and made all things for himself; then it is certain, that “of him, and through him, and to him, are all things;” and they shall be to his eternal glory. It is the doctrine of divine decrees, which supports the joyful doctrine, that all things in the universe shall terminate well. I will only add,

10. That it is a duty enjoined upon all men to confide and rejoice in the divine government.— But the decrees of God are the only proper foundation of this duty. It is written “The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof.” But what foundation can there be for this injunction, if God has not determined to govern the universe in the wisest and best manner? If he reigns without law, and without design; if he does not direct all things to his own glory and the greatest good; what just cause have any of mankind to rejoice, that he rules in the armies of heaven, and among the nations of the earth? It is certainly a just cause for mourning rather than rejoicing, that the Lord reigns, unless he has fore-ordained all things to promote his glory, and the highest good of his rational creatures; and, in his universal providence, seeks that great and noble design. But if God has decreed all things for his own glory, and the highest good of the universe, then he is

*absolutely fixed the sinful actions of men
Man then must do wrong.*

a worthy object of supreme affection, confidence and delight. Then all his creatures have infinite reason to rejoice, that God reigns and will forever reign. Thus the decrees of God are the foundation of all his works; and the foundation of all the doctrines of the gospel; and the foundation of all the happiness of saints and angels. The whole gospel, and the whole happiness of the universe depend upon the doctrine, that God has, according to the council of his own will, for his own glory, fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass. This very important and interesting subject, suggests the following remarks.

1. Ministers of the gospel ought, plainly and fully, to preach the doctrine of divine decrees. It is impossible to explain the doctrines and duties of the gospel, without explaining the decrees of God, which are their foundation and support. The doctrine of divine decrees is the light, strength and glory of the whole gospel.—With this doctrine the whole system of divine truth must stand, or fall. This doctrine, then, is to be plainly and fully preached, if ministers would teach their hearers any thing of the gospel in its real design, origin, connections and consequences. It is exceedingly important that preachers and hearers should, in their views and feelings, ascend to the infinite and eternal fountain, from which all the blessings of the gospel flow. This foundation is the purpose of God,

which he purposed in Christ Jesus. If pastors would lead their flocks to the purest and sweetest waters of life, they must in their instructions trace every thing to the decrees of God. In his decrees they will perceive the union of infinite knowledge, wisdom, power and goodness engaged for the accomplishment of the greatest, wisest and best objects. And the knowledge of his decrees will spread a bright and pleasant light over all the dark and painful scenes of earth and time. It will give importance and beauty to the existence of every object and event in the universe. It gives to the gospel a magnitude and sublimity, that extend from eternity to eternity.—If then the ministers of the gospel would promote their own knowledge, holiness and happiness;—the instruction and edification of real christians; and the repentance and salvation of sinners;—they must plainly and fully exhibit the doctrine of divine decrees, which are the eternal and immutable foundation of the whole gospel. This doctrine had the first and highest place in the instructions of the apostle. In his epistle to the saints at Rome, he ascends from stream to stream until he reaches the fountain of divine knowledge, wisdom and goodness in the the eternal purposes of God. And there his spirit rests and triumphs, in the face of every foe. “Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified.—

"Perpetuum est bellum"

*How can it promote the reputation of
sinners if God had a voluntary decree to shake
or shake not sinners?
If absolutely decreed he shall repent with penitency
the decrees of God must be very hard*

And whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" With what enlargement, purity and gratitude of affections does he begin his epistle to the saints at Ephesus? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace; being predestinated according to the purpose of him, who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." It is when the apostle dwells on the doctrine of the divine decrees, that he appears to comprehend what is the breadth and length and depth and height and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge;—to be filled with all the fulness of God. And now, if the preachers of the gospel would strip error of every deceitful appearance; give their instructions a divine importance and energy; establish the children of God upon the foundation of everlasting consolation and happiness; and destroy every dangerous and destructive refuge of sinners; they must not shun to declare the whole counsel of God. They must plain-

ly and fully exhibit the greatness, the wisdom, and the goodness of the divine decrees; and by the light of those decrees show their hearers, that the whole earth is filled with the glory of God; and that God will be exalted and glorified by every creature and every event in the universe.

2. If the doctrine of divine decrees is the fundamental doctrine of the gospel, then it is easy to understand the gospel. This first principle of the gospel is perfectly simple and plain. The doctrine of God's decrees is as evident, as rational, and as scriptural, as any doctrine, that respects his existence, perfections, agency and blessedness. And certainly there is no other doctrine of the gospel, that is more easily explained and understood than the doctrine of divine decrees. Indeed, while this doctrine is not explained and understood, it is impossible to understand, explain, or even to support any other doctrine of the gospel. But let this doctrine, which is perfectly simple and plain be understood, and it is easy to understand all the other doctrines of divine truth. This doctrine is light itself, and it casts a clear and pleasant light upon the whole gospel, and upon all the works and ways of God. They who cannot understand the gospel upon the foundation of the divine decrees, cannot understand it upon any other foundation; for the gospel has no other foundation.—It is by disregarding, obscuring,

*x or his decrees
who can understand God's
Mysteries or by searching for him
out?*

denying and opposing this doctrine, which is the foundation of the gospel, that ignorance of divine subjects has so rapidly increased, and extensively prevailed in this land for a number of years. And by the same means the way has been opened for the increasing and prevailing floods of error, which still rise and spread, and sweep such multitudes, with high hopes of heaven, in the broad way to endless woe and despair. They, who refuse to understand the doctrine of divine decrees, on which the whole gospel rests, cannot possibly understand any of its doctrines, duties, or blessings. But they will be involved in the darkness of ignorance, or be bewildered in the labyrinths of error and deceit. But they, who are in such a state, choose darkness rather than light; for it is easy to understand the gospel, which is wholly founded on the plain and simple fact, that God has, for his own glory, fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass.

3. Every scheme of religion, which excludes the doctrine of divine decrees, is essentially and fundamentally erroneous. No two schemes of doctrine can be more opposite than these two; one, that includes, and one, that excludes the doctrine of divine decrees. If God has not decreed all things, it is abundantly evident, that the gospel has no foundation. Since the decrees of God are the foundation of the gospel, every

scheme of religion, which excludes and rejects the doctrine of decrees, is fundamentally erroneous and deceitful. If God did not decree all things in the eternal counsel of his own will, there is no reason to believe, that he has ever done any thing. For it is absurd to suppose that he should act without a determination to act. The first cause of all things must have decreed all things. If God has not decreed, he has not caused all things. And if he has not caused all things, what reason is there to believe that he has caused any thing? If he has not caused any thing and every thing, what reason is there to believe that he exists. And if God does not exist, what reason is there to believe that any thing exists? There is no rational and consistent medium between the doctrine of the divine decrees and universal scepticism. If this doctrine be not true, what is true? Let this doctrine be renounced and overthrown, and there remains nothing of any real importance or solidity in the universe. It is written, "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God."—And can he be less unwise, who says with his tongue, there is a God; and yet denies the doctrine of his decrees? But who, that has any wisdom and goodness can wish, that this doctrine, which is the very foundation of the gospel, and of the whole glory of the universe, were untrue? Every scheme of doctrine, which excludes the decrees of God, subverts the whole

gospel and strikes at the foundation of rational and revealed religion. And it must be essentially and fundamentally erroneous.

4. They, who reject the doctrine of divine decrees, must, to be consistent, wholly reject the gospel. The decrees of God exactly agree with his character and perfectly exhibit his eternal and infinite greatness and goodness. They, who oppose and reject the decrees of God, oppose and reject his real character. The whole conduct of God, in the wonders of creation, providence and redemption, exactly agrees with his decrees. They, who oppose and reject the decrees of God, oppose and reject his wise, holy and sovereign agency. The decrees of God are his glory, and they who reject his decrees reject his glory. And when the character, conduct and glory of God are rejected, what can be seen of God, either in creation, providence or redemption? It is absurd to suppose, that any thing of the gospel of the grace of God can be supported, when his decrees, which are the foundation of the gospel, are rejected from the system of divine truth. Many persons, and not a small number of professed teachers of divine truth, can trace their declension and apostacy from sound doctrine to the rejection of the doctrine of divine decrees.—Being displeased by this doctrine, they have turned from the infinite holiness and sovereignty of the

living and true God. They have next turned from the divinity, mediation and atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. They have then rejected the sovereign and special influence of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of sinners. They have then discarded the essential difference between saints and sinners. They have then denied the doctrine of future and eternal rewards and punishments. They have next discarded the plenary inspiration of the scriptures. And having renounced in reality, if not in profession, the light of divine truth, they have groped at noon-day as in the night; and have groped as though they had no eyes. Now can it be fully and clearly denied, that such persons, as reject the doctrine of divine decrees, act consistently with themselves in their declension and apostacy from every doctrine of the gospel? Having rejected the foundation, how can they support any part of the superstructure? It is utterly impossible for such persons as reject the doctrine of divine decrees, to maintain, systematically and consistently, any doctrine of the gospel.

5. It concerns all persons to attend, seriously and candidly, to the doctrine of divine decrees, in reference to their own character and condition. No person can be indifferent in respect to this subject. It brings God near to us and places us with all our interests in his holy and sovereign hand. Nor is there any thing in the gospel

which is wholly founded on the decrees of God, that can take us from the hand of our holy and sovereign creator. Is it, then, the comfort and joy of our hearts, that God will deal with us and dispose of us forever according to his eternal decrees? Can we perform any duty, can we have any true joy or peace, or life, while our hearts rise against God, "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will?" Can we imagine that we love the gospel, while we reject and hate the doctrine of divine decrees, which are the eternal and immoveable foundation of the whole gospel of the grace of God? Let no one deceive himself; and let no one be deceived by the vain and false notions of such religious professors, and of such professed teachers of the gospel, as oppose and reject the very foundation, on which the whole gospel rests.

PAUL.

ON THE VALUE OF THE SOUL.

That mankind in general consider the soul of but little worth, is evident from their conduct. For they seem to be totally regardless of its interests; while all their thoughts and all their efforts are directed to the pursuit of earthly riches, honors and pleasures—Yet there is reason to conclude, that the human soul, however worthless it may be in the estimation of worldlings, is exceedingly valuable. And to make this appear is the design of the following observations.

1. Something of the value of the soul may be learnt from its nature. The soul is an immaterial, spiritual substance. Though it is mysteriously united to matter, it is neither blended with it, nor resembles any of its properties. The body is divisible, or may be separated into parts. But the soul is indivisible. It is in its own nature an intelligent, percipient, active being; and hence differs essentially from matter, which is wholly destitute of intelligence, thought and activity. In its peculiar properties, the soul faintly resembles its glorious author, who, it is said, "created man in his own image." It is true, that God's moral image, which is holiness, and which he originally impressed upon the soul of man, was obliterated at the fall, when sin took full possession of it. Yet it still retains his natural image, a spark of his intelligence, and continues to be in a high and peculiar sense "his offspring."—Hence the nature of the soul, and its relation and resemblance to the divinity, proclaim its worth. This further appears,

2. From the capacity with which it is endowed. We may rationally conclude from the nature and properties of the soul, as described by its creator, that it is capable of great things. The soul is, indeed, a creature; and therefore is not sufficient of itself to do any thing. It can neither choose, nor love, nor hate, nor think, nor exist, without God, in whom it lives,

and in whom are all its springs.— Yet he has formed it with a capacity for great achievements and acquisitions. His inspiration has given it understanding; and hence it is capable of making progress in knowledge to an extent beyond all the conceptions of created beings. We can only say that the soul being finite, can never become omniscient, can never by searching find out the Almighty unto perfection. The soul is also capable of making continual progress in holiness. That the soul, when pure and holy, was capable of becoming sinful, is proved by the fact, that it did become so.— And that having become sinful, it is capable of becoming holy, is proved by the fact, that it has become so. It possesses the same ability for the exercise of disinterested love and the performance of disinterested actions, that it does for the exercise of selfish love and the performance of selfish actions. It is certain, that the soul is able to make as rapid progress in holiness as in knowledge. Who then can tell how high in holiness it may rise, or how much good it may do? It is likewise capable of the most refined and exalted happiness; that happiness which flows from bright and ravishing views of Jehovah's glory, and from union and communion with him. The more it knows of God, and the more it loves him, the greater will its happiness be. And it is able to increase in the knowledge, love and enjoyment of

this infinite Being, as long as it exists. This being admitted, the value of the soul will be still more apparent, if we consider,

3. Its immortality. The soul, though united to a mortal body, is itself immortal. This, the light of nature does not teach. That boasted light, which the tongue of infidelity never ceases to pronounce sufficient for the instruction and guidance of man, dimly twinkles around him till the close of his earthly course, but sheds not a single ray on the valley of death, and penetrates not the darkness of the grave. The arguments drawn from the nature of the soul, its capacity for improvement and enjoyment, and its dread of annihilation; these and all similar arguments, however plausible, do by no means prove its immortality. For a created spirit is not in its own nature immortal, any more than an animated piece of clay. Indeed, there is nothing in the nature of any created thing, whether matter or mind, that tends to prolong its existence a single moment.— The human soul, like all other creatures, is constantly dependent on the will of God for its continuance in being. No wonder, then, that the wisest of the heathen philosophers wandered in the dark on this momentous subject, and rather wished, than firmly believed, that the soul would survive its separation from the body, and exist in a future state. But although the volume of nature affords no solid evidence of the soul's eter-

nal existence, yet the volume of inspiration furnishes this evidence. The gospel has brought the life and immortality of the soul to light.

Though "the dust shall return to the earth as it was, the spirit shall return unto God who gave it," and shall live forever. Now, if we view the soul in the light of that immortality which God has stamped upon it, we shall perceive, at once, that it surpasses in value all the riches and glories of the material creation. The sun, and moon, and stars shall be extinguished, the earth shall pass away, and time itself expire; but the human soul, surviving this dissolution of worlds, shall pursue its endless course, and contemplate with unutterable joy or unutterable woe the bright and awful scenes of eternity. As none but God, who made and sustains the soul, can have a perfect view of the whole of its immortal existence in the world to come, with all that it will know and do, and all that it will enjoy or suffer there; so none but he can fully comprehend its worth. I add,

4. That all which God has done and is doing for the redemption and salvation of the human soul, proclaims in most impressive language its inestimable value.—What labours have been performed, what sacrifices have been made, what wonders have been wrought, to accomplish his eternal design of redeeming and saving mercy! For this the created universe

was formed, and is sustained and governed from age to age. For this the Lord Jesus Christ descended from heaven to earth, became incarnate, and toiled, and bled, and died. And in a word, for this all things and events in the immense empire of God are brought to pass. The means employed for the accomplishment of this design, are such as have arrested the attention of heaven, earth and hell, and astonished the universe. It is true, that God's last end in all these operations is his own glory, which is infinitely the highest and most valuable end that either he or any other beings can pursue. But a subordinate, though unspeakably important end, is the redemption and salvation of the church, which is composed of human beings. Hence, in an important sense, all that God has done and will do from the beginning to the end of time, is designed for the redemption of the soul of man. Now would God preserve the frame of nature, would he cause the orbs of heaven to shine, would he bid the wheels of providence roll on for thousands of years, and would he give his Son to die on the cross, for the redemption of the soul, if the soul itself were of little worth? It cannot be. These marvellous works, whose magnitude and grandeur absorb and overwhelm all the faculties of the soul for whose redemption they are wrought, are full demonstration of its transcendent value, since they show in what

high estimation it is held by its creator.

1. How great is the loss which those must sustain who lose their souls! The loss of a thing is great in proportion to its value.—The incomparable value of the soul, therefore, proves that the loss of it must be unspeakably great. To lose the soul, is to be shut out of heaven, is to lose all that exceeding and eternal weight of glory and blessedness, with which the righteous are crowned. To lose the soul, is to be shut up in the prison of despair, is to share in the endless blasphemies, and wailings, and torments of the damned. How extremely foolish, then, as well as criminal, are those who pursue a course which tends to destroy their precious souls! This is done by many more persons than is generally imagined. All men come into the world in a state of ruin—they come into the world sinners. And sin is the moral debasement and ruin of the soul. Sin has despoiled it of all its spiritual beauty and excellence, and rendered it deformed and hateful. And there are multitudes whose conduct tends to destroy it forever. All the openly vicious are certainly doing what they can to drown their souls in destruction and perdition. This number is by no means small. It would be well, however, if none were sealing the ruin of their immortal souls, but such as walk in the polluted paths of vice. But it is a solemn truth, that very many

are doing this, who, in their own view and in the view of others, are moral and virtuous characters. Such are all those who toil to amass earthly riches, rather than to become rich towards God. Such are all those who seek the honors of the world, rather than the honor that cometh from God only. Such are all those who pursue the pleasures of time and sense, rather than the pure and imperishable pleasures which are found at God's right hand. And such, in short, are all who live impenitent, faithless, disobedient lives. The whole work of such as hate God, and Christ, and truth, and holiness, is the work of self-destruction. And what an immense majority of mankind this class includes! How vast the number, who, while they are solicitous to pamper and adorn their mortal bodies, which must soon be food for worms, neglect to adorn their immortal souls with the robes of righteousness, and the garments of salvation! Wisdom does indeed point out to the children of men, a path of pleasantness and peace, and bids them walk in it. But how few of them ever listen to wisdom's voice! How few of them ever travel in this radiant path, which opens into the splendours of eternal day! The throng voluntarily pursue the way of sin, of darkness, and of destruction, until death comes, and shuts up the gloomy scene forever. Can any thing equal their temerity and folly?

2. If souls are precious as we have seen, it fully justifies all the exertions and sacrifices that any have ever made to enlighten, reclaim and save them. This conclusion plainly follows, not only from the value of the soul itself, but also from the revenue of glory which its salvation brings to God. Numbers of mankind have from age to age made some efforts, and been at some expense, to save the souls of their fellow-creatures. But had they done a thousand fold more than they have, they would have been fully justified in it. Indeed, all that men have done, are doing, or will do to the end of time by way of means, would not transcend, or even *equal* the importance of the object, though the result of all their combined and protracted labours were only the conversion and salvation of a single soul.—For one soul is worth more than ten thousand worlds; and the glory of God in its salvation is of more value than all the intelligent and immortal beings that he has created. This labor of love, O how far does it excel, in magnitude and importance, all those works which worldlings prosecute with so much ardor, and make such costly sacrifices to accomplish! Time in its progress will corrode and destroy all their works, or the flames of the last day will burn them up forever. But those who engage in this work of God and of souls, are assisting to raise a monument to the praise of his glory, which will

stand to eternity the joy and wonder of all holy creatures. Surely then, there is no danger of doing too much in a cause like this.

Finally. Let such as have hitherto neglected the concerns of their souls, be persuaded to neglect them no longer. It is both the duty and the interest of every person to seek the salvation of his own soul. Do any ask what it is to do this? To become reconciled to God, to love him supremely, to submit to him unconditionally, and to live to his glory—this is to seek the salvation of the soul; for God is its life, its salvation, and its blessedness. They who deny themselves, they who exercise disinterested love, they who make the glory of God their last end, do truly desire and seek, and will certainly obtain, the salvation of their souls. They will lift up their heads with joy in that day when all who love and seek their own interest supremely, will call in vain to the rocks and mountains to hide them from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.

THEOPHILUS.

THE DUTY OF FASTING EXPLAINED.

Customs, which have been handed down from our fathers, and which from our childhood we have regarded, are less frequently made the subjects of our critical examination, than those which have had their origin in our own day.—

Many in this land, who have long been in the habit of observing days of fasting and prayer, when recommended by their rulers, have, it is presumed, seldom or never seriously considered the nature and importance of this ancient practice. That fasting is a duty, I shall, take for granted.— But with a view to excite attention to this important subject, and to correct some erroneous apprehensions respecting it, I shall here attempt to show how we ought to fast.

It can hardly be necessary to observe, in the first place, that in fasting we ought to abstain from our customary indulgence in eating and drinking. This abstinence is implied in the signification of the word *fast*. There can be no fasting without it. We may read, and meditate, and pray, but we cannot *fast*, without abstaining, to a certain degree, from our customary indulgence in food and drink.— The particular degree, to which this abstinence ought to be carried, must depend, in some measure, upon the circumstances in which we are placed. So much food and drink, as is essential to the preservation of health, ought, I apprehend, always to be taken. But on days of fasting, no more than what appears absolutely necessary for this purpose, should be received. That indulgence of the appetite which, on other occasions, is lawful, and which, as a general thing, is conducive to health and comfort, should on days of fasting

be foreborne. Fasting is voluntary self-denial, even in lawful indulgences. The design of it is to mortify the body, as a token of our ill-desert, as an expression of that self-abasement of soul, which we feel in view of our sins. In all the descriptions of fasting, which we have in the scriptures, voluntary abstinence from food makes a part. If any one is disposed to doubt the necessity, or even the propriety of this abstinence, let him consider, that the Lord knows best what is necessary and proper for his creatures, and as fasting, implying abstinence from food and drink for a limited time, is an appointment of his, sanctioned not only by his express command, but by the example of his most devoted servants in every age, we ought not rashly to deny its propriety and importance, even if we could not readily perceive them. Let him also consider, that the common sense of mankind is in favor of expressing the feelings of the heart by some significant and appropriate external act. The practice of rising, when we call on the name of the Lord, is generally considered as highly proper, on the ground that there ought to be some external token of the reverence which is felt for his character. It has always been considered proper for individuals, when bereaved of their friends to express their sorrow, by some external token. Hence we see badges of mourning. The afflicted lay aside their garments, the bright-

ness of whose colors are indicative of joy and gladness, and as an expression of their grief, clothe themselves in black. By the common consent of mankind, feasting is considered as one proper expression of gratitude and joy.—Accordingly on days of Thanksgiving, more indulgence in the good things, with which a kind providence has blessed us, is considered proper, than is allowable every day. Now, if it is proper that we should *rise*, when we attempt to address the Most High, as a token of our reverence for his Majesty ; if we may, with propriety, wear a badge of mourning, as an expression of our sorrow for the dead ; if as an indication of our joy and gratitude, we may on days of Thanksgiving partake of the bounties which a gracious providence has conferred upon us, ought we not, on the same principles, to express, by some significant external act, the self-abasement which we feel, when humbling ourselves before God for our sins ? And of what more proper expression of this can we conceive, than a voluntary abstinence from the blessings, which by our sins we have forfeited ? This is an external act, peculiarly well suited to the nature of true contrition. It is an act which strikingly manifests the ill-desert of sin, and publicly acknowledges the justice of God in punishing it. It is an external act well calculated to affect our hearts, and to give us a

lasting impression of our guilt and unworthiness.

2. We should fast under a deep sense of our sinfulness and guilt. As it is on account of our sins that we fast, to be destitute of a feeling sense of them, is inwardly to contradict what we outwardly profess. On days of fasting, therefore, it should be a part, and no small part of our business, to consider our ways. The sins of our hearts, the sins of our tongues, and all our external offences should be called to mind, and viewed in the light of the divine law. We should consider the greatness of the love which we have abused, the high authority which we have disregarded, and the numerous evil consequences of our sins both to ourselves and others. While fasting under a solemn consideration of these things, we should

3. Truly *repent* of all our sins. Their odious nature, as committed against a God of love, and their destructive consequences to ourselves and others, should lead us “to abhor ourselves” on account of them, and to “repent in dust and ashes.” To pretend to fast for sin, without repenting of it, is hypocrisy. Fasting is an external act, denoting, if it has any meaning, an humble and a contrite heart. If, therefore, this humble and contrite heart, of which fasting is only an external token, be wanting, of what use or significance is fasting ? It is hypocrisy. It can neither be acceptable to

God, nor serviceable to man. To this mere external fasting where there is nothing in the heart to correspond with it, our Saviour has reference when he says, "Moreover when ye fast be not as the hypocrites of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." In these words, our Saviour does not intend to condemn a sober countenance, or any other proper expression of humility, when it is accompanied with the reality; but merely that affected contrition, which led the hypocrites to disfigure their faces, while in the sight of God, they were destitute of true repentance.

4. Fasting should be accompanied, not only with true repentance, but with those external duties which are "fruits meet for repentance." Fasting, as we have seen, is a token of repentance.—But this is by no means an infallible indication of the reality. It is to be considered as evidence of true repentance, only when it is accompanied, or followed, with such an external reformation, as corresponds with the nature of true repentance. Those who have been guilty of injustice, cru-

elty, fraud, or oppression—those who have shut up their bowels of compassion against the poor, while they have seen them famishing with hunger, and suffering with nakedness, at their doors, must, if they would fast acceptably to God, not only feel the emotions of contrition in their hearts, but actually reform their lives. They must perform the external duties which they have neglected, and, as far as is in their power, make amends for the injuries which their sins have done. That their fasting, without this reformation, is an abomination in the sight of God, may be seen by a moment's attention to his own words. "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke. Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh. Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; and the glory of the Lord shall be thy rear-ward. Then shalt thou

call and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, *Here I am.*

5. Fasting should always be accompanied with prayer. It is the nature of that self-abasement and deep contrition, of which fasting is an external token, to vent itself in fervent prayer to God. Accordingly we find, that in the scriptures fasting and prayer are uniformly spoken of in connexion with each other. David not only fasted and wept, when his child was smitten of the Lord, but he fervently prayed for its recovery. When Paul and Barnabas were to be separated to the work of the ministry, among the Heathens, the apostles both fasted and prayed before they laid their hands upon them. Whenever there is an occasion for fasting, there is also an occasion for praying. Modern christians as well as holy men of old, always accompany their fastings with prayers. We need no other evidence, that mankind do not fast acceptably to God, than a knowledge that they do not pray.—A.

SERMONS—No. III.

PRAYER FOR THE INCREASE OF FAITH.

LUKE, XVII. 5.—*Increase our faith.*

Ever since mankind became enemies to God, they have been at enmity among themselves. And they have not failed to manifest their mutual enmity by mutual in-

juries. Destruction and misery have been in their way; and the way of peace have they not known. And so long as total depravity generally prevails in the world, every one, who lives in it, has reason to expect, that he shall frequently give and receive offences. This painful truth our Savior plainly taught his followers, in the beginning of the chapter, which contains our text.—“Then said he unto his disciples, it is impossible but that offences will come; but wo unto him through whom they come!” Christ then subjoins another admonition, no less necessary and important. “Take heed to yourselves; if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.” From these words it is evident, that christians should forgive an offending brother, as often as he manifests real repentance. But the disciples were so sensible of their moral imperfection, that this duty of forgiveness appeared extremely difficult. They, therefore, said unto the Lord, *Increase our faith.* These words place before us the following sentiment—Believers ought to pray for the increase of faith.

In our attention to this subject, it is proposed,

I. To consider what is implied in their praying for the increase of faith; and,

II. To inquire why they ought to pray for the increase of this grace.

I. It is proposed to consider what the prayer of believers for the increase of faith implies.—Faith, in the first instance, is the gift of God. The apostle says to christians, “by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” As it belongs to God to produce faith, so it belongs to him to increase it. For this reason believers ought to pray to God to continue and increase their faith. Faith, as well as every other christian grace, is the fruit of the Spirit. Christians, therefore, ought to realize and acknowledge their dependance upon God for the increase of faith. But the question now is, what do they mean, when they pray, that their faith may be increased?

1. This implies, that their faith may become more clear and distinct. It is written—“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.” In the exercise of faith believers look not at the things, that are seen, which are temporal; but at the things, that are not seen, which are eternal. Faith respects future, distant, eternal and invisible objects, which christians often view with a great degree of obscurity and indistinctness. When they contemplate upon the existence and perfections of God, his original and eternal designs, his operations in creation, providence

and redemption, they find it extremely difficult to form clear and distinct conceptions of these invisible and glorious objects. When they carry their thoughts into the world of spirits and contemplate upon the Lord Jesus Christ in his present exaltation, and upon the objects, employments and enjoyments of heaven, clouds and darkness rest upon their minds.—Though they really believe the existence of those things, which are not seen and which are eternal, yet their faith is no more clear and distinct than the objects of it. This darkness and deficiency of faith often gives christians pain and distress, and makes them ardently pray for a more clear and distinct faith of future and eternal realities. And the more clear and distinct their perception of these objects may be at any time, the more they desire to see them with increasing clearness; and the more fervently do they pray for the increase of their faith. Faith is always increased in proportion to the clearness, with which believers discern divine objects. God is able to increase their faith in this respect and give them a clearer and clearer discernment of the invisible things of the invisible world.

2. The prayer of believers for the increase of their faith implies a desire, that their faith may be stronger as well as clearer. The clearness and strength of faith are intimately connected; though really distinct. The strength of

faith chiefly depends upon the impression, which divine objects make on the affections of believers. A man may have a clear and distinct idea of death, without any deep sense of its nature and effects. So a believer may have a clear and distinct perception of the objects of faith, without a deep sense of their nature and importance. A strong faith arises from a deep and lively impression of the reality, importance and nearness of those things, which are future, eternal and invisible. It was such a sense of the being, power and faithfulness of God, that strengthened the faith of the father of the faithful. "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." Moses was strong in faith, when he left Egypt, because he had a deep and lively impression of the existence, perfections, purposes and promises of God. Therefore, "he endured, as seeing him, who is invisible." While the ancient patriarchs were pilgrims and strangers on the earth, God gave them a strong faith by making future things present, and invisible things visible.—The faith of believers is always weak, when they do not have a deep sense of the being, presence, purposes and faithfulness of God. But when God gives them a spiritual discernment of spiritual objects, and brings himself near to them, and brings them near to him; then he increases the strength of their faith. And this is one

thing they desire, when they pray for the increase of faith. Besides,

3. Their praying for the increase of faith, implies a desire, that their faith may be more constant, as well as clearer and stronger. They often feel and lament the inconstancy of their faith.—They very frequently lose a clear sight and deep sense of divine things, and become very heartless and faithless. This was the case of Peter, when he attempted to walk upon the water, and when he forsook and denied his master. And Christ often rebuked his disciples for their want of faith.—Real believers are more exposed to the inconstancy of faith, than of any other christian grace. Things that are visible and temporal, almost continually interrupt their faith. Though they have seasons of strong and lively faith, yet these seasons are usually of short duration, and succeeded by long intervals of stupidity and unbelief.—They, therefore, ardently desire, that their faith may become more constant. They desire to live in the continued exercise of a lively faith, and to enjoy a constant sense of heavenly and divine things. In this respect they find a great need of the increase of faith; and they have strong desires, that God would graciously cause that their faith should not fail. Could they only have constantly that degree of faith, which they sometimes exercise, they would think themselves extremely happy. It is, therefore, one of their most sin-

cere and ardent petitions, that God would increase the constancy, as well as the clearness and strength of their faith. It is now proposed,

II. To inquire why believers ought to pray for such an increase of faith. And here I would observe, *in the first place*, that they ought to pray for the increase of faith, because it is in its own nature desirable. A clear, strong, and constant faith, affords believers peculiar satisfaction and enjoyment. They never enjoy God so sensibly, as they do in the strong and lively exercise of faith. It is often said, in the scriptures, that the just shall live by faith. And it appears from the catalogue of worthies, which are mentioned in the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, that the most eminent saints in ancient times found great delight by the exercise of faith in the being, perfections, purposes and promises of God. While they were passing through the dark and trying scenes of life, the faith of future and eternal blessings, beyond the grave, gave them great support and comfort. And the apostles and primitive christians derived great peace and joy from the objects of faith. Nor will faith ever lose its efficacy in this world; but christians will always find peculiar benefit from the sensible exercise of this divine grace. Hence they ought to pray, that God would strengthen and enlarge their faith, which is so necessary to their comfort and happiness. But, *in the second*

place, they ought to pray for the increase of faith, especially, because its increase will increase every other christian grace. Here it may be useful, particularly, to illustrate the influence of faith upon all other holy exercises and affections.

1. The increase of faith will make believers increase in love to God and man. This the apostles knew would be the fruit of faith; and therefore they prayed, that God would increase it. While believers have the lively exercise of faith in God and divine objects, they never fail to have their hearts turned, with ardent affections, towards God and Christ and all his friends and all his enemies. When they view all things with an eye of faith, they feel attached to the glory of God and the good of the universe and the happiness of their fellow-creatures, whether saints or sinners, whether friends or foes.—Faith works by love; and love by faith. Love produces faith; and faith produces love. Saints never feel more of the spirit of heaven, than while they are in the exercise of a strong and lively faith of invisible and eternal realities, and have a deep sense of the glory of God and of the perfect holiness and happiness of heaven.

2. The more the faith of believers increases, the more they will exercise true repentance and godly sorrow for sin. When Job beheld God with a strong and lively faith, his heart melted into un-

feigned repentance and self-abasement. He said unto God, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee ; wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." A strong and lively faith had the same effect upon the heart of Isaiah.— When by faith he saw God on the throne of glory and heard the praises of the heavenly hosts, he cried, "Wo is me ; for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." For mine eyes have seen the king, the Lord of host." It is in the exercise of a clear and strong faith, that believers feel the greatest self abhorrence for hating, and opposing and disobeying God, the greatest and best of beings. They, then, blush to raise their face before him, and cry with the penitent publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

3. Faith produces submission to God under all afflictions and trials. While believers view the hand and heart of God in the evils they suffer, they never fail to feel a quiet and submissive spirit. Hence David said, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." And it was in the exercise of faith, that Job felt and expressed such extraordinary submission and patience under his numerous and heavy afflictions. "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord." In the lively faith of future things the primitive christians

said, "We reckon, that the sufferings of the present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory, which shall be revealed in us." Faith always increases and strengthens patience.

4. As believers increase in faith, they rise in hope. Hope rests upon faith and cannot exist without it. It is only in faith of future good, that christians can exercise that hope, which is an anchor to their souls, both sure and steadfast, entering into that within the veil. Faith nourishes, increases and strengthens that hope, which is the source of the greatest comfort and joy to christians in the present state. They know, by sensible experience, that the increase of faith will always be followed with the increase of hope.

5. True christian zeal for the glory of God and the interests of his kingdom is the genuine effect of a strong and lively faith. As christians grow in faith, they always, grow in zeal. While christians exercise a strong and constant faith in the promises of God respecting the prosperity of Zion, the extension of the gospel, the prevalence of piety and the salvation of sinners, they always feel a pure and fervent zeal to exert their power and influence to promote the cause of Christ and the interests of his kingdom. I might proceed to observe, that faith promotes self-denial, weanedness from the world, communion with God and every devout and heavenly affection. But enough

has been said to show, that believers ought to pray that their faith may be increased, because it serves to nourish and strengthen every other christian grace. Were christians only to live in the constant and lively exercise of faith, they would abound in the fruits of holiness and shine in all the graces and virtues of the Holy Spirit.—It is, therefore, their duty to pray for the increase of faith, as the first and greatest blessing they can receive from God.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. If all believers ought to pray for the increase of faith, then the best of saints are deficient in this grace. The greatest imperfection in the best of saints is their unbelief. Unbelief consists in the disregard and disbelief of divine truth. Satan deceived and destroyed the common parents of the human family, by producing in their minds a disbelief of what God had declared and threatened.—And in the same way, he blinds, tempts and destroys their apostate children. Even pious persons, who have been turned from satan unto God through the knowledge and belief of the truth, are constantly liable to fall into sin, darkness and sorrow through want of faith. Through an evil heart of unbelief the most eminent servants of God have turned from him and fallen into their greatest offences. Abraham, the father of the faithful and the friend of God, when he was in Egypt and when

he was in the kingdom of Abimelech, showed the greatness of his imperfection by the weakness of his faith. In the same way Jacob failed, though he had, through his life, constantly experienced the truth, mercy and faithfulness of God. Under his trials, he exclaimed, “all these things are against me.” In the same way Job failed and lost sight of God. Elijah also, through unbelief, fell into despondence in respect to the interests of religion. Through want of faith “Zion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.” Through unbelief Peter denied his master, Thomas questioned his resurrection, and all the disciples most frequently showed their imperfection. It is through their want of faith that satan, the father of lies, gains his greatest advantage against the church and children of God. This is the weak side of saints. Through their disbelief and disregard of divine truth they turn from God in their hearts and lose a sight and sense of his presence and glory. And then they are involved in darkness and fall into sin and trouble. The Lord Jesus Christ has constant occasion to say to his disciples, “O fools! and slow of heart to believe!”

2. If believers ought to pray for the increase of faith, then they ought to realize their need of it. Their unbelief ought to be a great burden to their hearts. They ought to know and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that they

do, so greatly and frequently, forsake the Lord their God, and withdraw from him their supreme affection and confidence. It prevents their obedience, usefulness and comfort. It hinders their progress in knowledge and grace. It is a great abuse of the special grace of God. He has made them believers and given them the light and joy of faith, which they ought never to lose. They ought to feel, that they render themselves as criminal, as they are unhappy, by an evil heart of unbelief.— Their unbelief is far more criminal than the unbelief of impenitent sinners. They ought to be ashamed and confounded, that they do, through a false and faithless heart, depart from the living God. Dr. Hopkins, who has left one of the brightest examples of true faith, that has appeared in modern times, deeply lamented his stupidity, senselessness and unbelief in respect to divine things. He says, “I have been conscious of my great and shameful stupidity and want of a proper sense of the things of God. This, which is more or less sensibly felt, is my constant attendant and the grief and burden of my heart, and matter of my constant confessions and prayer to God for deliverance from it; being always sensibly convinced, that no external light and advantages, or any means used, will in the least remove the stupidity and hardness of heart; but that the Spirit of God alone can remove it and give me that spirit-

ual sensibility and feeling of heart, which I seem most earnestly to desire. I consider this stupidity, blindness and insensibility of heart to divine things, to be altogether and infinitely criminal, as it must be owing to the moral corruption and depravity of my heart, or rather consists wholly in depravity and wickedness of heart, being hardened, contracted and bound up in selfishness and pride, and all the evil propensities which are implied in these. This is *unbelief of heart*, which is consistent with a conviction of the reason and judgment, of the truths contained in the gospel; for no degree of such conviction will in the least remove this blindness, hardness and *unbelief of heart*.”*

3. If believers ought to pray for the increase of faith, then their neglect to pray for it is decisive evidence of spiritual declension.— While, through faith, they advance in religion, their attention and their affections are fixed upon God and upon the riches and glory of his grace in Christ Jesus. In view of God, they perceive the necessity and importance of constant progress in the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. And they perceive the inducements and encouragements to pray always with all prayer, and desire and resolve to give themselves to this important duty. It is only by humble, fervent and constant prayer, that believers can maintain

* Life of Hopkins, p, 121,

such a sight and sense of divine objects, as are necessary to their spiritual prosperity. Their life and strength are not in themselves, but in God. And it is only by faith, that they can receive from God those supplies of divine grace, which are essential to their progress in religion. Without the spirit of watchfulness and prayer their faith will languish and decline. Whenever believers neglect to pray for the increase of faith, it is certain that their hearts have turned from God, and they have declined in respect to all the graces, duties and enjoyments of religion. The more faith believers have, the more they desire the increase of it. But the less they have, the less they desire the increase of faith and every other christian grace. If saints cease to pray for the increase of faith, they have lost a clear sight and deep sense of divine things. They have erred from the ways of God and hardened their hearts from his fear.

4. If believers ought to pray for the increase of faith, which has such a powerful and happy influence over all other holy affections, then they may discover the beginning of their spiritual declensions. They are conscious of great changes in their views, feelings and enjoyments. Sometimes divine objects appear to be evident and substantial realities; and the vain and transient objects of this world appear to be "vanity of vanities." At other times world-

ly objects arise and fill their minds, engross their hearts and exclude divine things. And frequently believers remain for a long time, in a dark, stupid and lifeless state. But they do not easily learn how they begin to decline, and fall into such darkness and deadness. The beginning of spiritual declension in believers is always in their hearts and consists in unbelief. It is always through an evil heart of unbelief, that they depart from the living God. "It is by faith, that spiritual mercies are received. If the christian backslides and ceases to go and receive, there is an immediate interruption of holy exercise; the sight of God's glory is departed; the sense of his gracious presence is lost; and the heart, being left alone, is weak, comfortless and wretched by the temptations of the world. All this happens from an interruption of faith, which receives spiritual life and strength from God. When the channel of receiving is stopped, the sanctifying, enlightening and comforting power of God ceases to flow into the soul. The life of a christian is derived. It flows forth from his Savior God, and his faith receives the gracious assistance. This faith is that seeking, which finds; that knocking, to which entrance is given. Experience witnesses the truth of this description. While a believer feels his dependance and goes to God for life and strength; while he is willing that God should have the glory of giv-

ing, he feels grace by a divine energy flow into his soul. He can say, God is my helper and my strength. Unworthy as I am, I feel a divine breathing into this polluted temple, and my soul ascends in adoration and praise.— Perhaps, faith never applies in this way, without some sensible return of communicated grace from the Redeemer, who is the way and the life of his people.”* As it is only by faith that believers receive life, strength and joy from God, their declensions always begin and continue through unbelief. Unbelief of heart leads to all manner of negligence, declension and temptation. When believers, through an evil heart of unbelief, depart from God, they become hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and are liable to fall into every iniquity and transgression.

5. If believers ought to pray for the increase of faith, then they ought constantly to attend to all the means of faith. These means are designed and suited to bring and keep the objects of faith before their minds. Spiritual meditation is of primary and peculiar

importance in respect to the life and increase of faith. This duty keeps the heart in a proper state to discharge all the duties and receive all the blessings of the christian life. The teachable and prayerful reading of the holy scriptures has a powerful tendency to increase the faith of christians.— The secret, private, and public worship of God produces the same happy effect. The devout observance of the sabbath, the preaching of the gospel, and attendance on divine ordinances, serve to excite and maintain the holy affections of believers, and to increase their knowledge and faith. On all these means of faith, christians ought, cheerfully, gratefully and constantly to attend, that they may preserve a clear sight and deep sense of divine things; and may with increasing holiness, comfort and joy, live and walk with God. But these means, without his powerful and special influence, will have no proper effect upon their hearts. They ought, therefore, always to pray unto God—
Increase our faith.

* Strong's Sermons, vol. i. p. 201.

EXTRACTS.

CONVERSION OF MRS. A.

The Spirit of God, I am now sensible, has been striving with me from my childhood. Many have been my checks of conscience, and fears of hell. But I

often stifled them. When I was married, and came to live with Mr. A. I found myself much tried with the sentiments, which were preached in this place. The doctrines of election, decrees, and

divine sovereignty, were to me very disagreeable. But after a while I resolved to throw these things from my mind, and care no more about them. For such was my situation, that I knew it would be much against my interest, and reputation, to be found an opposer of such preaching. Upon this my feelings became very secure; and I was wholly taken up with the things of this life. I was greatly desirous of obtaining property; and could not endure the thought of being poor. Often when I saw the prosperity of others, and that their situation was more affluent than mine, my heart would rise against God, as though he were a partial being, a hard master. And I often felt disheartened and discouraged.

On a Sabbath, Nov. 30, 1801, God was pleased to call my attention to eternal things. I was reading the parable of the rich man, Luke 13. The words, "But God said to him, Thou fool; this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be that thou hast prepared?"—took fast hold of my mind. I looked with amazement on my past life. I queried, what worldly interest would profit me, if my soul must be lost? I went to meeting with a heavy heart. The subject of the preacher was, the merchantman seeking goodly pearls, finding one of great price, and selling all his other property to buy it. The reading of the text much affected me. I felt that I was indeed un-

done, unless I could obtain that pearl. And how to obtain it, I knew not. I felt myself condemned; and thought I was going to eternal ruin. The sermon deepened my distressing impressions; and they continued for some time. But being much taken up in company, my distress of mind abated, and my convictions left me; though I had intervals of terror.

On Lord's day, March 1, 1802, I was reading a funeral sermon of a minister. The preacher spake of the meeting, which ministers and their people must have before the bar of Christ, what an account must there be given of all sermons, and of praying opportunities; and that companions, parents and children must there have a most solemn meeting. The words were set home upon my heart. I was greatly shocked. I reflected how many sermons I had heard; and to how little effect. How many prayers I had reason to believe had been made to God for me.—How highly I was exalted in privileges; and what wretched improvement I had made. When people came home from meeting, I endeavoured to conceal my feelings, but I could not. When some came into the room, I thought they would rise in judgment against me at the great day. I knew not what to do. I tried to read my Bible; but it all condemned me. Great enmity now rose in my heart against God, and his law. I could not endure the thought of being in his hands,

and of being disposed of as he should please. I was disposed to seek relief from the thought, that there is nothing in religion; or that all men will be saved. But my conscience testified against these expedients. I felt the presence and terrible majesty of God. I saw that I was in his hands; depended on him for every thing; and had got to stand before him in judgment. The thought was insupportable. I saw that God was a sovereign, and would have mercy on whom he would have mercy; and would dispose of me as he pleased. I imagined to myself, that he was the most tyrannical Being; and had placed me in a situation to be eternally miserable. At times I labored to do something to recommend myself to God. But here I could obtain no relief. For I saw that my heart was utterly perverse; and for my best performances I felt condemned.—I felt that I was an undone creature. What to do, or attempt, I knew not. But I fought against God with all my might.

One day as I was walking the room in anguish, I saw a man coming in, with a grave-cloth under his arm. I concluded some person was dead. I queried with myself, what must have been my situation, had I thus been called away! I was so shocked with the thought, that my strength failed me; and I dropt into a chair in silent astonishment. My load of guilt and wretchedness seemed insupportable. The next day was

the sabbath. I attended meeting, and heard a sermon from these words, "Lord save me; I perish." On hearing the text, I felt glad, and hoped I should now hear something, that would afford relief.—But O, my disappointment! Every thing that was said was against me, and seemed to conspire to cut me off. In the afternoon, the minister being called away to attend a funeral, at a distance, our deacons led in the meeting. One of them read Flavel's Husbandry spiritualized. The author spake upon pruning orchards, and cutting down the trees, which cumbered the ground. This I saw was my case. I felt myself to be a cumberer of the earth; and thought I should not be suffered to live. Such was my view of my wicked heart, and of my just condemnation, that I felt myself ripe for destruction. Coming home from meeting, and feeling my heart wrangling against the book which had been read, I asked the deacon, as he passed by with it under the arm, to lend that book to me. The fact was, I wanted to read it myself, in hopes of finding it less terrible to me. He looked me in the face, and said he was glad to have me take it. I felt mortified, and was sorry I had asked for it. I read the pages, which I had heard at meeting. But I was so far from finding relief, that I was the more wounded and distressed.

I kept my troubles as much as possible to myself. I had said

nothing concerning them to Mr. A. For I well knew his strict evangelical sentiments, and what he would say to me. This I had no desire to hear. He had often attempted to converse with me; and I had as often evaded it. For I was utterly unwilling to make that surrender of myself to God, which I well knew he would press upon me.

At night I retired to bed, but I could not sleep. My anguish increased, till I thought I must speedily die. I could refrain no longer. I asked Mr. A. if he was awake? I found he was. I told him I was in great distress of mind, and I thought I must soon die under it. He replied that he had long perceived my trouble, and had tried to introduce conversation with me; but finding me utterly unwilling to converse with him on the subject, he had refrained. He then conversed freely with me, and clearly described my state, my duty and only ground of hope. But the opposition of my heart rose violently against the truths urged upon me. I replied that I could not feel reconciled to God, unless he would save my children and friends, as well as myself. He told me this feeling was unreasonable and wicked; that my will must be bowed and made submissive to the will of God; I must unconditionally embrace Jesus Christ, or be unavoidably miserable. I then begged of him to say no more, and go to sleep; for I could hear no more

of this. My enmity against God and all religion, at that time, was inexpressible. I lay and thought upon my dreadful case. I felt myself to be in the immediate presence of the Almighty God;—that he looked me through and through;—and I felt I was justly condemned to be forever miserable. I would have fain fled out of God's hands; but I was infinitely unable. It tortured my soul to think I must be disposed of at his sovereign will. I rose from my bed, and desired Mr. A. to pray with me. He did. But alas, such was the bitterness of my heart, that I could not unite with him in prayer. My distress increased, till I thought I was actually going to die, and sink into eternal despair.

I now saw and felt that God had a perfect right to do with me as he pleased. And I was willing to give myself up into his hands, that he should dispose of me for time and eternity, as he should see fit. The following words slipped from my cheerful tongue, *I am willing to be in the hands of God, as clay in the hands of the potter!* My distress was gone. I fainted, and for some time lost my senses. When I came to myself, I found myself upon the bed, and in a most calm and peaceful state of mind. All my opposition and trouble seemed to be gone. I knew not the cause. I had no idea of having been made a subject of renewing grace.—The thought turned in my mind, that I had lost all my convictions.

This something alarmed me. But I felt delighted with the character of God. Christ appeared just such a Savior as I needed, and altogether lovely. I felt a satisfaction in giving up myself into his hands, to be disposed of as should be for his glory.

Reflecting on my feelings and comparing them with the word of God, I began to admit of a hope that I had passed from death unto life. I hope my heart is reconciled to God. And truly I am convinced that the salvation of lost man is wholly of the Lord, and according to his own sovereign will; and not for any thing in the creature.

I now desire to own my glorious Savior before men; to walk in the order of his kingdom; and to partake of the rich benefits of his gracious ordinances.

THE HABIT OF MAKING EXCUSES.

There are certain faults of a minor kind, which, by their frequent recurrence, poison the mind more deeply than some others of a more alarming nature, and therefore well deserve our attention. On one of these, *the habit of making excuses*, I shall take the liberty of offering a few remarks. This practice is the refuge of weakness or of sin. So prone is man to error and to transgression, and so much is it incumbent upon him ingenuously to confess his faults or his mistakes, that when the

making of excuses becomes a habit, it cannot be characterised in lighter terms. A false excuse is evidently a sin; a flimsy excuse is as plainly folly; and to suppose that others will be satisfied with it, or that it will raise us in their estimation, is a sure mark of a weak, unthinking mind. Some unchristian practices require long habit to render us familiar with them; but this which we are considering commences so early, and is so congenial to our nature, that it takes the appearance not so much of an acquirement as of an instinct, bearing some analogy to those which are given to animals for the purposes of self-defence. The learned and the ignorant, infancy and age, seem alike acquainted with this universal art, and almost equally perfect in its application.

We are angry: it is indignation at vice. We are niggardly: it is in order that we may assist more deserving objects. We are extravagant: our station requires expense, our health indulgence.

Dr. Franklin is said to have had a servant who was never in the wrong. At length the Doctor's patience was exhausted, and he said, "my good friend, you and I must part. I never knew a man who was good at an excuse, good for any thing else."

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ANECDOTES.

Bishop Burnet, the Arminian prelate, affected to wonder how a

person of King William's piety and good sense, could so rootedly believe the doctrine of predestination. The Royal Calvinist replied, "Did I not believe predestination, I could not believe a providence; for it would be most absurd to suppose that a being of infinite wisdom would act without a plan! For which plan, predestination is only another name."

Some preachers near Olney dwelt on the doctrine of predestination. An old woman said—"Ah, I have long settled that point; for if God had not chosen me before I was born, I am sure he would have seen nothing in me to have chosen me afterwards."

A preacher, who was travelling in the stage, was asked by one of the company, if he believed the doctrine of election. "Be sure, I do," said the preacher. "Why then," said the querist, "do you preach the gospel?" "Because," said the preacher, "I believe that doctrine." "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid; but speak, and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city."—"Therefore, I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation, which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

ORDINATIONS.

The Rev. CHESTER ISHAM was on Wednesday the 13th February, ordained over the Trinitarian Congregational Church and Society in Taunton (Mass.) The Introductory Prayer by the Rev. Mr. Huntington, of North-Bridgewater; Sermon by the Rev. Mr. Green, of Boston; Consecrating Prayer by the Rev. Mr. Fiske, of Wrentham; Charge by the Rev. Mr. Andros, of Berkley; Right Hand of Fellowship by the Rev. Mr. Cobb, of Taunton; Address to the Church and Society, by the Rev. Dr. Codman of Dorchester; Concluding Prayer by the Rev. Mr. Sheldon, of Easton.

The Rev. WILLIAM EATON was on the 10th ult. installed over the the first Congregational Church and Society in Middleborough (Mass.) The Introductory Prayer by Rev. Mr. Ide, of Medway; Sermon by Rev. Mr. Fay, of Charlestown, from Acts XIV. 1. Consecrating Prayer by Rev. Mr. Cobb, of Rochester; Charge by Rev. Mr. Andros, of Berkley; Right Hand of Fellowship by Rev. Mr. Gay, of S. Bridgewater; Address to the Church and people by Rev. Mr. Holmes, of New-Bedford; Concluding Prayer by Rev. Mr. Spring, of Abington.

In Northampton, the Rev. MARK TUCKER, as associate Pastor with the Rev. Solomon Williams.—Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Nott, President of Union College.

In Ashburnham, Rev. GEORGE PERKINS, Sermon by the Rev. JOHN SABIN, of Fitchwilliam.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

* * Alpha, C, Tyro, Anagnosces, and Perdue, are received, and on our files.